

“Anxiety” // Matthew 6:24–34

// *Smoke from a Fire* #2

We are in our **second week of our series on Emotions** called “Smoke from a Fire.”

- The **basic idea** is that our strongest and deepest emotions function like smoke from a fire—we can follow the trail of that smoke down to see what is “on fire” in our life.
- **When you smell smoke in your house**, the wise thing to do is never to whiff it away—instead, you should follow the trail of that smoke and figure out what is on fire.
- In the same way, we need to **learn what our emotions are telling us** about the state of our heart.

Today, I want to talk about an **emotion we’ve all dealt with** to varying degrees: **ANXIETY**.

We **posted a question on Instagram** this week, “What makes *YOU* anxious?” I got back some interesting responses:

- One was, “*Looking at Instagram makes me anxious.*” I thought, well, get off of it!
- Then there was, “*The thought of you preaching a sermon on anxiety makes me anxious.*” And mom, stop posting on my Instagram accounts.
- “*When your countdown clock hits 0:00 and it still sounds like you are in your introduction.*” That was from our program people.

The **more serious** responses were: (*come up one at a time*)

- **Money** (usually this was expressed as, “I’m worried about not having enough to take care of my kids or my aging parents.”)
- **Being alone** (This was the #1 reply)
- **The future**
- **Being accepted by others**

- Going to the doctor
- Whether I am truly living out God's purpose for my life
- Losing control
- Being separated from my family
- **Never meeting Nicolas Cage in person** (I may have submitted that one).
- Being able to find the right spouse
- Being able to have a child
- Losing a spouse or child
- Losing *another* child
- **Failing as a parent**

Just the **number of responses** was pretty overwhelming.

Anxiety is one of those problems that gives birth to all kinds of other problems. Like one fire that quickly spreads throughout the whole house of your life. **John Piper** says, “*Think about how many other sins are connected to the root sin of anxiety. Anxiety about money will cause you to hoard or steal. Anxiety about succeeding will make you irritable and impatient with those around you. Anxiety about relationships will make you withdrawn or indifferent toward other people. Anxiety about what others think about you will make you lie or stretch the truth. If anxiety could be conquered, a mortal blow would be struck to many other sins.*” —**John Piper**¹)

So today, we’re going to look at what Jesus says about worry—it’s one of his most profound and insightful teachings, I believe—It comes at the end of Matthew 6, right in the middle of his famous **Sermon on the Mount**.

- Anxiety is an opportunity to **trust God**... to lean on him.
- (BTW, this is **such a favorite passage of mine** that I constantly refer to bits and pieces of it, and so I wondered if perhaps **Matthew 6 was too familiar**, but when I went back and looked, I haven’t preached straight through this whole passage since 2003,

¹ Lightly edited

and half of our worship team were still in diapers at that point, so I thought it was time to do it again. **So, we good?**

*(Now, one quick caveat—as with all of these emotions, there can a lot going on when you experience anxiety. **Last week I explained that our bodies and souls are integrated**, so what happens in one inevitably affects what happens in the other, and **for some of you there are other factors going on in anxiety** that have to do with your physiological makeup, or past traumatic experiences, or even the kinds of relationships you are in in the present. And I want to be **careful not to collapse all anxiety problems into the spiritual bucket**. I am dealing with, primarily, the **spiritual** root causes of anxiety. For those of you with more significant issues, I'd encourage you to **consult our G4 ministries**.)*

Let me just **read the passage on anxiety in its entirety**, because it is such an **important** one: ²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Funny place to **start a discussion on worry?** Good question.

²⁵ Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?

²⁶ Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they?

²⁷ Can any of you add one moment to his life-span by worrying?

²⁸ And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. ³⁰ If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here

today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you—you of little faith?

³¹ So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles (pagans; separated from all religion; people who don't know God at all; Duke students) eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. ³⁴ Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

In this passage, Jesus makes 3 main points about anxiety.

I. Anxiety thinks too little of God (vv. 24–29)

- This is the **most profound, counter-intuitive point** in this passage. Most of us think of anxiety as an emotion that just naturally arises from the uncertainty of life, but **Jesus says it is an emotion** that is intimately connected to our **deepest desires**. We worry most about what we are devoted to most.
 - If you want to see what you are most devoted to
- Let me **prove that really quickly**:
 - I don't worry that much about **your kids' grades**. I care about your kids and I want them to do well. But you don't worry about my kids grades and I don't worry about yours because you are not devoted to my kids.
 - I don't lose much sleep over what your boss thinks about that project you turned in last week. If you ask me to pray about it, I will, but I promise within 10 minutes I'll forget about it. But you won't, because I am not devoted to your job like you are. Make sense?

- We **worry about what we are most devoted to**. Which is why Jesus **starts this discussion on anxiety by challenging** what we are most devoted to.²
 - **See the word “therefore”** in vs. 25? ²⁵ “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Any time you see the word “therefore” in the Bible...
 - **What is this “therefore” pointing to?** The previous verse: ²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Jesus knows that what we’ll worry about most is connected to what we are devoted to most, so when it’s time to discuss anxiety, he starts with the big one, money? He says, “**If you are devoted to money**, then that’s what you’ll worry about all the time. If you think that money is the one, indispensable ingredient in the good life, then you will worry all the time about it—about getting it, keeping it, not losing it.”
- And **THEN he asks a serious of questions** that challenge our devotion to money. He says, ²⁵ **Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing?**
 - IOW, is money really what defines the good life?
 - He then **gives 2 examples that demonstrate it is not:**
 - First, he says, **consider the birds** in the sky (vs. 26): “They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them.” **Birds don’t spend much time worry about saving**, yet they never seem to lack because God takes care of them.
 - Second, he says, **consider the wildflowers** in the field (vs. 28): “They don’t labor or spin thread. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these.” Flowers don’t spend much time worrying about looking pretty, yet they are beautiful because God adorns their lives.
- The point is not that we shouldn’t save, or that we shouldn’t ever use money to buy nice things for ourselves. just that we should not be devoted to money as the primary source of security and beauty, because our Heavenly Father will take care of those things for us.
- The **key point comes in vs. 33**, when Jesus says, ³³ **But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.** IOW, **be devoted to God**—worry about pleasing him and doing his will, focus primarily on obeying him with your money—and God will take care of everything else—including your security and your beauty.
 - Whenever I use this verse I think of **C. S. Lewis’s 1st things, 2nd things**
 - When it comes to **worrying about money**, people fall into one of **two personality types**, both of which are addressed in Jesus’s illustrations.
 - For some, **money is their source of security**. So, their favorite thing to do is save it. When they get an extra \$1K, they save it.
 - For others, **money is the beauty, their significance**, and their joy. And so, when they get an extra bonus, they spend it—they upgrade the car, the wardrobe, the lifestyle...
 - Savers and spenders. And, in **God’s sense of humor**, these two kinds of people always get married to each other. And both of them think the other one has a problem with money. The saver thinks the spender is too irresponsible; the spender thinks the saver is too uptight.
 - Jesus is **telling both the saver and the spender** that they have the same root problem with money, just in different directions—**both are devoted to money as necessary** for some aspect of the good life.
 - **Jesus addresses the saver** through the ‘birds’ illustration—the birds don’t save and they are fine;

² Andy Stanley, “Devotion Emotion,” part 1 of the series *Why Worry?*, preached at North Point Community Church.

- He addresses the spender through the ‘wildflowers’ illustration—they don’t spend any money on clothes and they are gorgeous.
- So, he tells both of them: Devote yourself instead to God, he says, and let God be the primary source of your security and the primary source of your joy, and just like the takes excellent care of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, he’ll take care of you.
- Again, he’s **not saying we should never save for the future** or buy nice things for ourselves—just that our primary devotion, our primary concern—should be about pleasing God and then we can let him worry about those things.
 - **Caveat:** Some of you may be anxious **about money** because you have poor spending or saving habits, and, if so, you should attend one of our **Financial Peace University** sessions and develop good habits—but for many of you it is because you think money is THE key to the good life and you are devoted to it.
- **Money is your 1st thing...** Jesus says, ‘Make God your 1st thing, and he’ll add these other things—security and joy—into your life. **In life, there are 1st things and 2nd things...**
- You can **apply this principle**, of course, to other things besides money—Jesus just knew this was **the big one**. Jesus **could have said**, “*Don’t worry about your parenting. Do the birds of the field worry about their parenting? They just push the kids out of the nest and say “fly” and their kids turn out all right—because God makes sure they will learn what they need to know.*
 - **Just like with money**, that wouldn’t mean we don’t need to put time and energy into parenting—just that we should not be anxious about it—we should be **primarily devoted** to God and let him worry about your parenting!
 - **When I’m seeking to obey him** in my parenting, the promise is that he will take responsibility to make things work out.
- Do you **follow Jesus’s thought pattern here?** When it comes to money, parenting, marriage, education and career and any of the other litany of things we worry about, God is not telling us to sit

back and do nothing. He is saying that we need to do what we do in obedience to God, to the best of our ability and trust him with the results and not stress about them.

- We shouldn’t stress out about, “*Did I handle that conversation exactly right? Did I say everything I was supposed to say? Did I make the right decision? What are other people really thinking about me?*” **We do our best and trust God with the results.**

Anxiety thinks too little about God—because it elevates the obtaining of other things besides him as the most essential element the good life. The **good life is more than making a lot of money**; it is more than good career choices and successful parenting techniques and finding the right person... (Or, as Jesus said, “**A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**”) The good life is walking with God and letting him provide all those things.

Which leads to the 2nd observation...

II. Anxiety minimizes how much God thinks of me (vv. 26, 30)

- After he tells us to **consider how well God takes care of the birds** he says, ²⁶ **...Aren’t you worth more than they?** And, **after talking about how beautiful God made the flowers**, Jesus says, ³⁰ **If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t he do much more for you—you of little faith?** This is an **argument from the lesser** to the greater.
 - He’s saying **if God is the kind of God who even cared**, in creation, about the safety of birds and the beauty of flowers, don’t you think he cares about you?
 - He’s pointing us to the **character of the Heavenly Father**. Isn’t it obvious from creation that we serve a blessing, prospering God—a good, good Father who loves to bless and prosper us?
 - **That’s the argument from the lesser to the greater**—if he cares for birds and begonias, surely he cares for you.
- In **one of the other Gospels**, where Jesus teaches something similar, he **also argues from the greater to the lesser**. He says,

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been *pleased to give you the kingdom.*” (Luke 12:32) How pleased was he to give us the kingdom? Enough to send Jesus to the cross. If God loved you enough to give Jesus for you, would he neglect your day to day needs?

- *“Listen to the voice of the Lord speak: ‘I will help you. It is a small thing for me, your God, to help you. Consider what I have already done. What? Not help you! I bought you with my blood. What? not help you! I died for you. Since I have done the greater, will I not do the lesser things for you?’” Charles Spurgeon*
- **According to the Bible**, this should be **so obvious it is beyond question!** Two verses I hope are so familiar to you that you have them memorized:
 - **Isaiah 49:16**, “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? (Has that ever happened?) **Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;**
 - **Romans 8:32**, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” What more would God have to do to prove his commitment to you? This reminds me of my **kids sometimes on vacation**—after spending the day at Disneyworld we are 30 minutes behind when we would normally eat dinner, and my kids say, “Dad, are we not going to eat?” And I’m like, “*You think I brought you this whole way to starve you? Isn’t just being here proof of my commitment to you? Do you know how much it cost to get you here? Do you think I’m standing in a 2-hour line to ride Dumbo for 90 seconds for me? Surely if I care enough to bring you on vacation, I care enough to keep you fed. Not that this has happened recently...*
- **Surely if God cares enough** for us to send his Son to the cross to die in humiliation for us we can trust him with our bills, our spouses and the future of our families.
- **John Owen:** What greater insult... ?
- Anxiety, for the Christian, is **completely irrational**—it means you believe God can take us to heaven but **can’t handle you on earth;**

that God is good for eternity but **insufficient for time**; that he delivered us from damnation but won’t do the details of our day to day lives.³ **You’ve got to choose**—you either believe in the God of the Bible **or you don’t.**

- That’s why he brings up the **comparison to the Gentiles** in **vs. 32.** He says “*It’s the Gentiles*” who worry about all these things.
 - You’re **acting like an atheist**, he tells them, or at best one of these pagans who thinks that God is this capricious Viking, **a glorified thug, whose good side** you have got to stay on lest he smite you.
 - You, by contrast, have a **heavenly Daddy**—who cares more about you than you care about your kids and would no sooner neglect you than you would one of your kids!
 - **So, stop acting like an atheist!**

It’s **impossible to really believe** in the God of the gospel and be anxious (at least **for spiritual reasons**)

Here’s another place where **Paul says the same thing:**

Philippians 4:6, “Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”⁷ **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

- It helps me to reflect on the fact that I am COMMANDED not to worry. (***Be anxious for nothing.***) Not just in this verse, but 4x in our text in Matthew today, Jesus commands us not to worry! And get this, “**Fear not**” is the **most repeated command** in the Bible: 366x. That can’t be a coincidence. **Every single day** there is a new “fear not” command for you!
- **The only way those commands** make sense is if God is thereby promising he will take care of the things we are worried about. Right?

³ Tony Evans, delivered on January 25, 2018, “Reversing Anxiety Consequences,” from series U-Turn, sermon on Matthew 6:25-34

- If we are **headed to lunch together and you say**, ‘Oh no, I don’t have any money!’ and I say, “Don’t worry about it,” the only way that is not a cruel joke is if I plan to pay for it. Right? If the **bill comes** and I say, “That’s awkward. Guess you’ll have to stay and do dishes now,” and you say, “But you said not to worry about it,” and I say, “Oh... that? **I didn’t mean I was going to pay for it.** I just wanted you to have a sense of peace and tranquility as we dined together,” that would be a cruel joke. **The only way it makes sense for God to tell us**, “Don’t be anxious” is if he has got the things that are making us anxious.
- So, **instead of being anxious**, he says, *“in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”*
 - The key words there are **“with thanksgiving.”**
 - **Give thanks as you pray** that God has got it! It’s impossible to thank him for his answer if you’re still worried about it.
 - I **used to have the problem of praying—I guess** out of this sense of duty but not really trusting in God as I was praying. My prayer time was basically, “anxiety hour with Jesus” where I reported to him all the things I was worried about. Just (as I’ve heard one of our other pastors say) *“worrying in the direction of the ceiling.”*
 - The **kind of prayer Paul** is talking about here means laying your problems at Jesus’s feet and leaving him with the burden of them. You thank him for the answer he has promised to give. It leads to **the peace that passes all understanding.** There are 2 ways I have trained myself to pray this way:
 - I **developed the habit of doing what Paul says here**: “Let your request be made know with thanksgiving,” which means thank him he is handing whatever you are worried about. It’s **impossible to say thanks** if he you are not trusting him to answer.
 - He **may not always answer** the exact way I want him to it, but **this passage gives me the assurance that he will**

answer and I know he is always good all the time so I can rest my worries at his feet!

- I **read a secular strategy for coping**: “The 15 min strategy.” You can do this—punt it till that appointed hour, and then during that 15 min you can worry out loud with Jesus but end it by saying, “I trust you with this *because you commanded me to cast these burdens on you and thank you for answering them.*”

One more great point Jesus makes about worry in Matthew 6...

III. Anxiety is a false prophet (vs. 27, 34)

It **offers false solutions**, makes **false promises** and offers **false predictions**.

Worrying about stuff always makes me feel a little better—like somehow by **devoting energy to anxiety** I am doing something about whatever I am worried about.

- **Jesus points out two problems** with that:
 1. **Vs. 27, Worrying doesn’t actually change anything.** Look at Jesus’s question in vs. 27: **“Can any of you add one moment to his life-span by worrying?”** Will worry actually add to your life? No. Ironically, if anything, it will just shorten it. **Doctors point out that 75% of all doctor visits are stress or anxiety related.** Dr. Charles Mayo of the famed “Mayo Clinic” wrote, “Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and whole nervous system. Though I have never known a man who died of overwork, I have known a whole lot who died of worry.” I saw a bumper sticker one time that said, “Anxiety is **my daily cardio.**” It’s not a good one. **Anxiety is a false prophet—it promises that if you devote time to it, it will change things.** But that is a lie.
 2. **Second, Jesus says, anxiety is a false prophet because the vast majority of the things we worry about never take place!** You worry about 1000 things that never take place. I’ve heard

it described as **paying interest on a debt** you may not even owe. Or **like hearing the threatening music** in the soundtrack of your life when there is actually no danger. I remember watching a scary movie with my wife and they are in some peaceful scene by the lake and all of the sudden the ominous music starts and you know it's about to go down. And I told **Veronica that it would be great if I could have ominous music play** when something bad was about to happen me. Like when some relationship was really going to go bad, when I first met them this sinister music would play in my ears... and I'd know, "This is not going to turn out well.") And then I realized the **bigger problem was that ominous music plays** in my heart when there is nothing for me to be scared of! **Think about how many things you worry about that never happened!**

- **Look at how Jesus addresses this in vs. 34:** ³⁴ Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because... each day will have trouble of its own. I think, "Well, **that's exactly what I was worried about** with tomorrow!" **But guess what will also be there tomorrow?** God. And the God who gives you strength today will give you strength tomorrow. He **won't deal with the 999 things** that don't happen but will give you the strength to deal with the 1-2 that do.
- The way God taught this to the children of Israel was through his provision of manna in the wilderness. There in the desert so there's no food—so every morning when they woke up all over the ground would be these little **vitamin-packed Ritz Cracker-looking things** for them to eat called "manna." And, of course, there were gluten-free options for people with allergies. But here was the deal: you could only gather enough for *that day*. If you tried to stockpile it—it would go bad and bread worms. **The exception was on the morning before the Sabbath day**, where you could get 2 days-worth and miraculously it wouldn't go bad that night. **What was God teaching them?** Don't worry about tomorrow. I'll provide what you need tomorrow. I'll send more "**whatever it is for whatever you need**" for tomorrow's needs.
- **The way most of us want to deal with worry is stockpile enough that we are invulnerable tomorrow.** That's foolish.

1. For one, you can **never fully prepare yourself** for tomorrow—and so you'll always be worried about if you have enough or if someone how you will lose it. *What if I get robbed? What if I lose my job? What if my 401-K crashes? What if I'm falsely accused at work? What if my kids want nothing to do with me? What if my wife or me gets diagnosed with cancer? What if I never get married?* You can never prepare for all contingencies.
2. So, it's foolish, but it's also **unnecessary**—because **the God who is faithful to you today promises** to be as present with you tomorrow as he is today. And he's going to be there to deal with anxieties you don't even know about yet! (He's like, "Hey you are worried XYZ about tomorrow... but none of that is going to happen. And actually, DEF is going to happen, that is MUCH WORSE. But don't worry about it, because **I'm an A-Z kind of God**. I've got WHAT IS IT for every letter of the alphabet and I'll have a "what is it" for whatever letter of anxiety life throws at you.

MUSIC

LOOK AT ME: **Tomorrow will have troubles.** (Everybody look at your neighbor (*shake your head* like this) and say, "*Something's gonna go wrong next week.*")

But there is a way to face the uncertainty of tomorrow—or next week—without anxiety today. *Because he lives, I can face tomorrow! Because he lives, all fear is gone! Because I know he holds the future, my life is worth the living, just because HE LIVES!*

Anxiety causes you to worry about 1000 bad things that won't actually happen and keeps you from **leaning with joy and peace on the God who promises to give you strength** for the 1 or 2 bad things that are actually happening to you!

- I love how Charles Spurgeon (who, if you remember from last week dealt with a lot of anxiety himself) said it, "**Anxiety does not**

empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength.” - Charles Spurgeon

- **Whatever tomorrow holds**, God will be there to give you daily strength.

Anxiety a false prophet. In the OT they stoned false prophets. You need to stone anxiety every time it shows up in your life and **turn your attention to the one, true prophet**—the prophet who never lies, never fails, and always keeps his promises—JESUS!

- Jesus was **not just a prophet that told the truth**—he was a prophet that took everything we would have been afraid of to begin with and put it away on the cross and tells us now to trust him with everything else.

So, what is the conclusion of the whole matter? ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. AND ³⁴ Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because I am the God of yesterday, today and forever. **tomorrow will worry about itself.**

- The God who SAVED you yesterday and DELIVERED you today surely will PROVIDE for you tomorrow.

The **answer to worry is not a trouble free-life**, or an invulnerable future, but a relationship with the God who controls time and who **promises not a hair falls from your head** without his knowledge and permission.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose, he'll never—no never—desert to his foes!

What more can he say than to you he has said, to you who to Jesus for refuge have fled!

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed, For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid; I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.”

“Bow your heads” // PRAYER/INVITATION

What I've hoped you've seen is that anxiety ultimately goes back to breakdown in our relationship with God.

It happens first when we think too little of God.

Are you MOST devoted to God?

- In life there are 1st things and 2nd things... Is Jesus first?
- When you look into the future, what is the one essential thing that must be there?

Anxiety happens when we minimize how we feels about us.

Can't you tell him that you trust him?

- *Can't you say right now, “Jesus, if you cared enough for me to come down and suffer and bleed for me on a cross, surely I can trust you with the concerns of my day-to-day life now.*
- *That is what he inviting you to do! If you are a God who stands outside the bounds of eternity, surely you can manage the days of my life.*

Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus...!